1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

plaited, red woollen yarn; in the centre of the thick end of the rattle a circular hole has been made, 1.5 cm in diameter. It is through this hole that the above mentioned seeds have been poured into the calabash. The hole has then been stopped up with a plug of some black, waxy substance. The visible part of the plug is decorated with a mother-of-pearl button which originates from the whites. On the calabash there is carved ornamentation. 534

Rattles do not always contain only seeds, for in their interior one may also find other articles, such as bits of tinplate, glass beads and bits of glass (usually worn into a resemblance of pebbles), see fig. 182.[1] The incised ornament on these rattles is probably in every case of magical significance, even when, as on the rattle in fig. 170, it does not form any pictorial representation which is perceivable by the uninitiated. Pictorial representations are, however, fairly common on magic rattles of calabash (see fig. 181) In many rattles, the seeds, bits of metal, etc., have been introduced by way of a hole at the end of the handle, fig. 181, into which a plug of wood has then been inserted. This kind of rattle is as a rule without a hole at the base, or carrying string (see table on page 169).

Nordenskiöld[2] as well as Karsten[3] has given valuable accounts of the dances of the Choroti. At some of these the Indians wear a kind of dancing girdle, hung with animal hoofs or dried fruit shells which beat against each other at the dancer's movements, and in that way make a rattling noise. Karsten has tried to establish that all Choroti dances originally were of magical purport,[4] whilst Nordenskiöld is of opinion that the Choroti also possess purely profane dances, connected with the sexual life of these Indians.[5] Nordenskiöld describes this kind of dance in the following way: »In the larger villages, among the Choroti as well as the Ashluslay, there is dancing every night, nota bene, if the belly is not empty. For the young people these dances are everything; all their interest 535 ● [534] 535 302

[1] The bits of glass that one finds inside magic rattles are as a rule so much worn and stone-like that it requires a mineralogist to ascertain the fact that they are not products of nature (see fig. 182). The statement that one often finds the magic rattles of the Choroti containing stones (Vide von Rosen (3), p. 12), is erroneous, and due to the illusive resemblance that these worn bits of glass bear to quartz pebbles.

[2] Nordenskiöld (18) and (17).

[3] Karsten (1) and (4).

[4] Karsten (4), p. 26.

[5] Nordenskiöld (17), p. 145.

535 centres on them. It is for them that they paint and deck themselves out.
302 At these balls the young Indian tries to appear as elegantly apparelled, as originally painted and decorated, as possible. Each day he paints himself after a different fashion, and arranges his ornaments differently. — These gentry, upon growing into older, staid, married men, no longer adorn themselves for ball parties, but only for war. — As to the Choroti girls, I have often seen them anointing their bodies with fish oil, which imparts to then an unpleasant smell. Their own opinion on this point is
[832] no doubt a very different one. To their thinking, we Europeans have an offensive cow smell. The level of elegance affected by the men is never
535 attained by the women. Still, they are, however, able to make the consoling reflection that it is, anyhow, in the first place for their sake that the lords of creation spend several hours of the day on their toilet.

»As has been said, it is in dancing that the whole interest of the young men and the young women centres. When the sun has set, then it begins. In a circle, or in a single rank, the men dance, marking the time by singing, may be: 'Táe-a-sa-lé, táe-a-sa-lé'. As the rhythm of the singing is slow or quick, so is the dancing. Music is a thing unknown at these
[533] dances. The chants that are sung are untranslateable refrains, which often are international, i. e., are used by many different tribes. The girls dance behind the men. Among the Choroti Indians it is the girl who takes the
[832] initiative in the matter of amatory ventures. She simply carries off with her, from the ball, any particular young man whom she may want as her lover for the night. These dances made a grand spectacle, as the moon, or a bonfire of pampas grass, shone on the gleaming bodies, I have seen as many as a hundred men form a dancing circle. At times the dance went quite slowly; at times it would go at a breakneck speed, raising clouds of dust, so that all one could see was a whirling melée of bodies and waving ostrich plumes.«

535 Of the dances of the Chaco Indians,[2] those that are obviously magical
789 are mainly performed as ceremonies of exorcism against dreaded spirits who have it in their power to cause illness or death; according to Karsten, magic dances are also resorted to in order to enhance the supply of wild, edible fruits.[3]

[1] Extract from Nordenskiöld (13), pp. 73, 75—77, and 79.
[2] Karsten (1).
[3] Karsten (4), pp. 25 – 28.

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 S17 Mataco

Choroti SK6

584 the Indians live a happy and joyous life. We may therefore say that this is the proper »pairing-season» of the Chaco tribes, and particularly of the Choroti. At other times of the year, when fruit becomes scarce and life to the Indians is often a hard struggle for existence, they are little inclined 584 for merry-making, love, and marriage. In October, when the very nutritive chañar fruit ripens, the Chaco Indian is, as it were, revived, and a 535 few weeks later, when the algaroba and the tusca trees give their much 836 appreciated fruit, his life is at its gayest, manifesting itself of course in his sexual interests also. Those young men and women who want to be married then wander about from one village to the other, where dances take place. In each village three dances, those called *Jóhlōki*, *Ahlénta*, and *Avúshe*, are performed on four successive evenings. Free sexual intercourse is connected with these dances, and the girls play an important rôle in them although they do not actively take part in the entertainment. The dances of the Chaco Indians are mainly entertainments of the men. The girls generally content themselves with merely looking at the dancing youths, making their choice among them. Incidentally however a girl may be seen dancing for a while behind a man whom she particularly likes with her hands laid upon his shoulders, and after the dance she takes him away and keeps him for that night. This is something one may notice after each dance, and thus the Choroti dances during the »season» often have the character of real sexual orgies. The last *Avúshe*-dance on the fourth evening is, however, supposed to be decisive as far as marriage is concerned; those girls who have found the men whom they want to marry then keep them not only for the night, but for ever. The young man is taken to the village and house of the girl, where he stays as her husband, becoming a member of his wife's family.

584 The *Avúshe* may therefore be called the proper courtship and marriage 535 dance of the Choroti. The very name of the dance is interesting from this point of view. The Choroti word *avúshe* means 'vulture' — not the black vulture, but another kind common in the Chaco[1]) — and the name therefore may be translated as »the Vulture-dance». The idea of the Indians seems to be that just as the vultures jump and dance round their prey, the dead animal, so the Choroti men in the *Avúshe* dance jump round the girls trying to »conquer» them. The girls at this dance, it should be understood, stand within the ring formed by the dancing men. All the young men who take part in the dance are dressed in their best clothes

[1]) *Polyborus vulgaris.*

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco

Choroti SK 6

and ornaments, wearing many-coloured mantles, necklaces, ear-tubes, big ostrich plumes on the head, and having the face painted. The men form a circle round the girls with arms interlaced round each others' waists. The dance chiefly consists in jumping with both feet at once and stamping hard upon the ground to the measure of a very noisy but monotonous chant. The ceremony is called *níssammaha aséhne*, »to hurry on the girls». The expression »to hurry on» (*níssammaha*), as we shall find later, is used by the Chaco Indians in many cases where there is a question of magically influencing the course of nature for good and useful ends. Just as the Indians believe they can hurry on or promote the growth of the fruit by influencing the tree spirits and by exorcising the evil demons who are trying to blight them, so they »hurry on» the girls in the sense that by the dancing and chanting the latter are prompted to make a definitive choice of a husband, whereas at the same time evil spirits are kept away from them. Courtship and marriage, it should be noted, are of those numerous critical occasions in human life when malignant supernatural powers are believed to be more than otherwise on the alert to do harm and spoil the good designs of men, and as usual the weaker sex is supposed to be particularly exposed to them. The courting dance *Avúshe* is thus in part held with the intention of keeping off this invisible molestation, so that the girl's choice of a consort for life may take place under good auspices.

A man who is not taken away from the dance by a girl has no possibility of getting either a temporary paramour or a wife. The matter wholly depends on the girls, and there are of course always men who for one reason or another are despised. I sometimes noticed such unfortunate lovers at the Choroti dances. Their experience had led them not to take part in the dances; they were sitting in a hut close by, eagerly shaking the rattle gourd (*pelíte*), as they said, »to hurry on the girls» and thus possibly to have better luck in the future. Since the women are much fewer in number than the men, it is necessary that some men are obliged to remain bachelors all their lives. These men were ridiculed not only by the women but also by their more fortunate brethren. On the other hand, there are no unmarried women, and even widows soon remarry unless they are very old.

The men may try to attract the girls at the dances by their beautiful ostrich plumes, necklaces, and other ornaments, but these means of attraction certainly only play a subordinate part. The Choroti woman evidently expects something more of a man whom she thinks of marrying

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process and the other procreative functions of the woman is realized. The attainment of puberty therefore for the Indian girl certainly means the beginning of her sexual life, but at the same time it means her entrance into a very critical epoch of development, during which she is often — especially at child-birth and during the following menses — exposed to supernatural dangers. Hence the initiation ceremonies at puberty have for their object partly her direct protection against these dangers for the time being, partly her purification once for all from the evils associated with her sexual functions during the years to come or — to express it more plainly — to *harden* her against evil spirits. From this point of view we have to regard all puberty ceremonies of the Indians, even such practices as painting, scarification, and tattooing of the body or face, often undertaken with girls on the attainment of puberty.

In the dances and conjurations performed in honour of girls at puberty it is the women who, contrary to what is generally the rule in religious ceremonies, play the most prominent part. Among the *Choroti* the puberty of girls is celebrated with a magical dance called *Káusima* after the instrument which the women use for it; the instrument is called *káhuis*. The *káhuis* is a dancing-staff, two or three meters in length, made of a light kind of wood or bamboo, which has a bunch of deer's hoofs tied at the top. These rattles produce a hollow sound when the staff is struck on the ground and are supposed to possess a mysterious power to influence the spirits. This power of course must be explained from the fact that to the Choroti the deer is a demoniacal animal. The *káhuis* staff is the only magical instrument used by the Choroti women and it is never handled by the men.

The dance begins at the first new moon after the appearance of the signs of puberty, because the moon is believed to cause and have great influence upon the menstruation of women. It is performed every day until the following new moon, sometimes even still longer. At a *Káusima* dance which I witnessed the arrangement was as follows. The mother of the girl and some other elderly women formed a circle, or rather an elliptic ring, outside the hut where the girl was, each holding her rattling dancing-staff. Close to the ring four medicine-men were sitting at equal distances from one another, holding their rattle gourds (*pelíte*). There were besides two more medicine-men standing up, each provided with a drum. During the dance the women moved round ceremoniously with slow, regular steps, chanting loudly and marking time with their rattle staffs which they struck on the ground. The men outside the ring also chanted, shaking

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their rattle gourds, whilst the men provided with drums beat them. The girl in whose honour the dance was held was standing motionless and silent at the entrance of the hut reclining against the wall and had to remain so during the whole ceremony. Sometimes, when towards evening she got tired and was on the point of falling asleep, one of the medicine-men came up to her and shook his rattle close to her face as if to keep her awake. The ceremony began in the afternoon and was continued with short pauses throughout the whole evening until midnight. I was informed that as long as the dance goes on the girl need not be veiled, but as soon as the conjuration is finished for the night she must have her face and her whole body well covered. During the whole period that the dance is performed she is moreover obliged to fast, avoiding fish and meat and living only on some light vegetable food.

I may add that all the men who took part in the ceremony were painted on the face in one way or another. Some of them simply had the face coated red with roucou or black with charcoal, whereas others had X-shaped or other patterns painted on the cheeks. The men's faces are always painted in this way at the conjurations of the Indians, and these paintings have a purely magical significance.

The drinking of algaroba beer also forms part of the magical practices at the feast, but it is strictly limited to the men.

The object of all these ceremonies is to protect the girl against the evil spirits, the *möhsek*, by which she is believed to be particularly attacked during her unclean condition. The spirits try to enter into her through the face — especially through those parts where there is a natural opening of the body, such as the eyes, the ears, the nose, and the mouth — and also through the ventral parts, the consequence being, if they succeed in doing so, that she will fall ill and die, or become supernaturally pregnant and give birth to a monster. It is in this way that the Indians account for the birth of those deformed children which they kill directly after birth. To prevent such frightful accidents the girl's head and body are covered after the conjuration is finished for the night. By means of the dancing, chanting, drumming, etc. the evil demons who take an interest in the girl and swarm about her are conjured and rendered harmless. According to the idea of the Indians she is not only protected for the time being against their attacks, but she will also retain a certain power of resistance against them in the future.

The puberty of a girl is not celebrated in all cases among the Choroti with so many ceremonies as in the case just described, but the

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Painting by E. Wasteen

The *Kduslma*, a magic dance of the, Choroti, performed in the honour of girls at puberty.
The girl is standing at the entrance of the hut.

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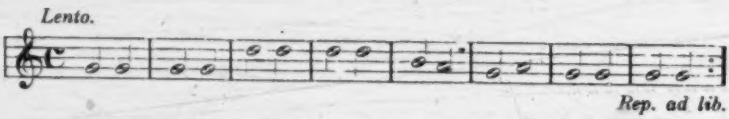
Kausima dance is always obligatory. Thus in a case which came under my notice the dance was performed by a middle-aged woman who, holding the dancing-staff (*káhuis*) in her right hand, proceeded with slow regular steps backwards and forwards in front of the house, where the girl, in whose »honour» the dance was performed, was sitting motionless. The woman accompanied her dance with a peculiar monotonous chant marking time, as usual, with the *káhuis*. Sometimes one of the small girls went and joined her, holding the dancing-staff together with her and walking in the same time. The dance and chant was begun at sunset and continued with short intervals till midnight. The melody of the chant which was repeated over and over again, was the following:



It is evident that the object of the dance was to drive away or keep off the evil *möhsek* who were trying to harm the girl.

Exactly the same custom prevails among the neighbours of the Choroti in the south, the Ashluslay Indians, who in their culture are so closely related to the Choroti. The fact that the rattling dancing-staffs form a magical instrument peculiar to the Chaco tribes, may also be inferred from the puberty ceremonies in vogue among the *Lenguas* of Paraguay. These ceremonies are shortly described by Mr. Barbrooke Grubb, but since he gives no explanation of their significance I may mention them in this connection, with more reason since the Lenguas are culturally closely related to the Indians of the Mataco-Choroti group. The main dance is, as among the Choroti, performed by the women who circle round the girl to be initiated, chanting and marking time with their rattle staffs. A troop of lads, dressed in ostrich plumes and wearing masks to represent evil spirits, issue from the forest, running one behind the other in a serpentine formation, move in and out among the crowd, jingling bunches of hoofs and from time to time uttering prolonged shrill cries. At their near approach the women dance and chant with increasing vigour round the girl pretending to protect her and to drive off the masked »spirits» [1]). The idea just indicated by me with regard to the Choroti, namely, that the young woman will, through the initiation, become permanently har-

[1]) Grubb, *op. cit.* p. 178.

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
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in their magical dances and conjurations the Indians as a matter of fact most often deal with these particular evil spirits.

These are features common to the religious beliefs of all Indians of the Chaco; indeed they are found among all South American Indians. But even in the Chaco this general belief in spirits appears in somewhat different forms among different tribes. The *Choroti* fancy that the spirits, *môhsek*, in their external appearance have the shape of old, withered men (*kihîlahs*). They are, in the imagination of the Indians, provided with wings, which enable them to move rapidly through the air. Owing to their bird-like appearance the spirits are also called *ahuena* («the birds»). They are countless in number, mostly invisible, and as a general rule evilly disposed towards mankind. I never met an Indian who professed to have *seen* a *môhsek*, but nearly all say that they have *heard* their voices at night. One peculiarity of the demons of the Chaco Indians is that they only exist at night. As soon as darkness sets in the Choroti Indian fears mysterious dangers from the *môhsek*, who are then believed to draw near the villages in great numbers and even to enter into the huts, visiting the inhabitants with sickness and death. This is the reason why a traveller living with the Choroti can hear from some house nearly every night the low chant of some old man accompanied by the dull sound of the rattle gourd, *pelîte*, with which he tries to conjure and keep off the supernatural pests. At daybreak however the spirits are supposed to leave for the forests and the plains — with a piping or whistling sound, the Indians explained to me, which they are very clever in imitating. For this purpose the Choroti use a special kind of round whistle which they generally wear hanging round the neck as an ornament. At their religious dances they produce, from time to time, shrill whistling sounds with these whistles, professedly with a view to conjuring the *môhsek*. The Indians believe that they can keep supernatural beings at bay by imitating them in their external appearance or their sounds.

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In the Chaco many weird sounds are heard at night which are apt to fill the natives with superstitious fear. The Choroti frequently told me about the »nightly whistling of the spirits» (*yap môhsek ahnáh*). The peculiar piping or whistling which is most often identified with the sound of the spirits is, I believe, produced by certain insects living on the stems or branches of the trees. The spirit of the tusca tree was specially mentioned to me, but this spirit is said to be a »good» being.

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The idea of the Choroti, that the spirits have the shape of old men, has given rise to a peculiar and cruel custom. They do not allow their

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I have so far only spoken of the dances and other rites which take place at the preparation of the sacred drinks. During the algaroba season festivals are held almost continuously, and these festivals are chiefly celebrated with drinking-bouts and dancing. Those of the Chaco Indians who have been in contact with the whites and seen the great festival with which, in Argentine and Boliva, they celebrate their carnival in February say that the algaroba season is their own carnival time and that they, too, have their carnival dances. The dances which among the Choroti take place at that time have partly been described before in connection with the customs practised by these Indians at courtship and marriage. In addition to the customary courtship dance *Avúshe*, the great festival, which is called *lākinene*, is celebrated with two more dances, those called *Ahlénta* and *Jóhlōki*. *Jóhlōki* is the name by which the Choroti call the Tobas, a fact that seems to indicate that the Choroti have borrowed the dance from their neighbours. The Tobas themselves call the dance *Nahotti*. It is a ring-dance; the dancing men are arranged in a circle and have their arms round each other's waists, moving round to the right or to the left to the rhythm of a chant. The *Ahlénta* again is identical with the Toba dance *Nomi*. Nevertheless, the Choroti seem to have borrowed it from their southern neighbours, the Ashluslay Indians on the lower Pilcomayo, a fact that may be inferred from the name; for just as *Jóhlōki* means »the Toba dance», so *Ahlénta* means »the Ashluslay dance» (Choroti *Ahle* = Ashluslay). I would add in this connection that the dances of the Chaco tribes are, in the main, common to all the tribes; there are certain dances which occur among different tribes under different names.

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The chants sung at the dances are rather monotonous and are composed of a series of words which apparently have no meaning; for instance in the *Jóhlōki*:

Hä-e-sa-alia,
Hiáh-hia-ália,
He-éh-hia-ália, hia-ália,
Hi-áh,
Hä-he-éh, hä-he-éh,
Hä-se-éh, hä-se-éh, hä-se-éh, etc.

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Only the younger unmarried men perform these dances, the older ones being constantly engaged in drinking algaroba beer (*atäs*). Unmarried girls are allowed to be present, but as we have seen they do not as a rule

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take part in the dances, although courtship is connected with them. After the dances sexual intercourse is indulged in by the partakers in the festival, each girl choosing for herself a lover for that night among the dancing men.

Nordenskiöld mentions the Choroti as an instance of Indians who have purely profane dances, pointing out that they have special reference to the sexual life. The latter of course is true of some dances; but Nordenskiöld's mistake in regarding the Choroti dances as purely profane is due to the fact that he did not study their customs thoroughly and therefore failed to see the ideas underlying them. In fact, it is clear that the Choroti dances are gradually losing their original magical or religious significance and have a tendency to degenerate into mere amusements, a course of development which we frequently notice with regard to Indian customs. But even the Choroti dances still, in the main, retain their ceremonial character. Thus my Indian informant, an elderly man, told me that when the Indians dance they collect the whole supply of fruit gathered for the occasion in the house of an old man, i.e. a man initiated in the magic art; and *they believe that the dancing will make the fruit abundant* — not only these particular fruits, but those growing in the forest as well. The principle is again the same as in the Mataco dance to promote the growth of the sugar cane and in the Toba dance to make the chañar fruit abundant. As we have seen, the drumming, practised by the Choroti and the Mataco during the »season», has to a certain extent a similar object. That the chanting which accompanies the dances has at the same time for its object to frighten away evil spirits, is evident.

From this point of view it is interesting to compare the ceremonies performed by the Choroti during the »season» and the sexual liberty connected with them with certain »mysteries» of a similar kind practised by some Indian tribes in other parts of South America. Thus the Yurupary ceremonies of the Uaupes Indians in north-western South America present a close analogy to them. Among these tribes also certain mysterious ceremonies, consisting chiefly in dancing, are performed at those seasons of the year when the most important fruits reach maturity. The object of these ceremonies appears to be to influence the spirits which are thought to animate the plants and thus to promote fertility. Many facts show that these spirits are nothing but souls of the dead which have taken up their abode in the trees and plants. Moreover, at these mysteries sexual intercourse is promiscuously indulged in by those

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taking part in them, evidently with a view to propagating the useful plant spirits and giving them an opportunity to enter into the women and to be reborn in human form.[1])

I believe that in the Choroti dances performed during the algaroba season and the sexual licentiousness which forms part of them we have in fact remains of similar mysteries in the Chaco, which for one reason or another have partly lost their original significance, having now at the outset only the general character of joyful harvest festivals.

Again, the great festival dance of the Tobas is the *Nomí* already mentioned. It is performed on all particularly solemn occasions, but especially during the algaroba season. It is the great »carnival» dance of the Tobas. Even some time before the proper season begins the Indians start to dance, believing that by dancing they can accelerate the ripening of the fruits (*niapilák map*), just as the Mataco and the Choroti believe that they can hurry on the ripening of the fruits and the coming of the season by beating drums. In dancing the Indians arrange themselves in a long line, or so as to form a crescent. With arms interlaced round each other's waists they move, running alternately to the right and to the left and at the same time forwards to the other end of the dancing place where the chain is broken. Thereupon they move back in the same way. As is customary in the Chaco, the dancers themselves chant the measure of their steps in a loud voice. Similarly the women do not take part in the dance although they are allowed to be present as onlookers. — During the season the dance goes on daily and is believed to influence continually the growth of the fruits.

But the *Nomí* dance is performed during the algaroba season with another object in view also. The Tobas believe that at this happy and joyful time they receive invisible guests in great numbers. These are the *kadepakál* or *ilúh*, i.e. the spirits of departed Toba Indians, who also want to be present at the joyful festivals and to take part in the drinking-bouts. But these guests, who are feared or at any rate awake uncanny feelings in the living, are not welcome and do not receive any sort of cult. On the contrary, measures are taken to keep them off, and the Indians told me that precisely this is part of the object of the dance *Nomí*. The dancing men by means of their movements and their loud chanting prevent the spirits of the dead from approaching the villages or the place where the drinking and feasting goes on.

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[1]) See my *Civilization of the South American Indians*, pp. 427 sqq.

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sible. I may add here that the Choroti men are in the habit of wearing round their neck a kind of flat whistle made of wood and ornamented with incised figures. With these whistles they produce shrill sounds from time to time during the dances, which are supposed to imitate the sounds of the spirits and have the power of frightening them away.

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How the Indians believe themselves to be able to influence even natural processes by imitating them, appears in an interesting way from the following curious ceremony which I witnessed among the Choroti. These Indians cultivate the maize only on a very limited scale, and it is among them a rare cereal. In a village the women had obtained some maize and were cooking it on the open place outside the huts. While the maize pots were boiling, the women sang in a loud, quavering, guttural voice, which it is impossible to describe exactly, an extremely monotonous chant, which was evidently meant to imitate the monotonous sound and the regular, bubbling movements of the water boiling in the pot. The women explained to me that *in this way the pot would boil well and the maize soon become soft*. The chanting was thus a means of »hurrying on» a natural process according to the same magical principles as we have noticed in several other cases.